While Mercury thermometers/sphygmomanometers used traditionally for measuring body temperature/blood pressure, have been replaced in some countries due to environmental concerns, there are also concerns in many countries about the availability, affordability and accuracy of alternative devices. At present there is no proposal to phase out the use of mercury based instruments in Government Hospitals as also in private health facilities.

Medical plants in the country

†1458. SHRI SAMAN PATHAK: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have details of species of medicinal plants and their numbers found in the country;

(b) whether it is a fact that the medicinal plants which are found in the Himalayan regions are being taken out of the country illegally; and

(c) whether Government have any proposal to open research centers for medicinal plants in the Himalayan region, Darjeeling and Sikkim?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI PANABAKA LAKSHMI): (a) As per available reports, it is estimated that there are about 8000 plant species having medicinal properties.

(b) There are no such reports.

(c) There is no such proposal. Government has set up a Task Force on High Altitude Medicinal Plants to deal with various issues related to development of these plants.

Pesticides and hormones in eatables

1459. SHRI EKANATH K. THAKUR: Will the Minister of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that the growing use of pesticides in crops and hormone injections used to keep the produce fresh have increased the poisoning risk;

(b) whether it is also a fact that according to environmentalists, the content of pesticides in our fruits and vegetables far exceeds the permissible limits and his Ministry has failed to curb the growing use of pesticides in crops; and

(c) if so, the steps Government propose to take to contain the use of pesticides and injectable hormones in crops, fruits and vegetables?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE (SHRIMATI PANABAKA LAKSHMI): (a) and (b) The pesticides, if used indiscriminately on crops may be a risk of health. However, it is essential for controlling the pests and diseases in crops. In order to ensure that pesticides used are safe, the Ministry of Health and F.W. prescribes maximum residue limits (MRLs)

†Original notice of the question was received in Hindi.

before any pesticide is registered by Ministry of Agriculture under Insecticides Act, 1968, for use upon any crop.

There is a considerable evidence that usage of pesticide in agricultural crops has steadily declined during 2004-05 to 40,672 tonnes as compared to the consumption of pesticides in agriculture, 80,000 tonnes in 1984-85.

For ensuring safe use of pesticides, the Ministry of Agriculture provides extension services and training on safe use of pesticides through its Farmers Field Schools (FFS). The Department of Agriculture and Cooperation follows the policy of Integrated Pest Management (IPM) for managing pest problems which is environment and ecology friendly. It combines cultural, mechanical and biological pest control techniques with minimum dependence on chemical pesticides. Promotion of Integrated Pest Management(IPM) would result in reduction of the problems of pesticides residues.

Vegetable samples collected in Delhi have not been detected with pesticide residues above the tolerance limit. In 1117 samples collected in the rest of the country, residues have been detected above tolerance limit in 3.8% of the samples.

(c) With the objective to collect, collate and analyze data of pesticide residues in agriculture, animal produce and food commodities at the national level, the Ministry of Agriculture has launched in 2005, as a Central Sector Scheme, "Monitoring of Pesticide Residues" in agricultural, animal and food commodities at the national level for which a sum of Rs. 10 crore has been provided for the Scheme, during 2007-08. The scheme provides for strengthening the identified pesticides residues testing laboratories and getting the samples of selected commodities analyzed for pesticide residues and other harmful elements.

The Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), under the Ministry of Commerce have developed Residue Monitoring Plans for exports of the commodities such as fresh grapes, gherkins, egg products, groundnuts and honey to control use of pesticides residues in food products which are having the export potential. Besides evolving a Scheme for Laboratory Recognition for commercial testing of products from the field level to the export stuffing to enable the exporters to get their products tested for residues of pesticides, drugs and contaminants, it launched Certification Mark "Quality Produce of India" extended to meat products, basmati rice and Fresh Fruits and Vegetables.

Nurses-patient ratio

1460. SHRIMATI BRINDA KARAT: Will the Ministry of HEALTH AND FAMILY WELFARE be pleased to state:

(a) what is the nursing staff-patient ratio in the country;

(b) whether it is a fact that the nursing staff-patient ratio in the country is much lower than that of international standards; and

(c) if so, the proposal of Government to improve the situation?